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Fact Sheet – Wider Bandwidth

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Wider Bandwidth Will Expand Internet Access to Libraries, Schools

Students, teachers, and other friends of education across Rhode Island are enthusiastic about the possibilities that technology offers for improving instruction and advancing student achievement. We have a great opportunity to move forward with these innovations in Rhode Island. Investing in wider bandwidth for our schools and libraries will enable us to provide more digital information to Rhode Island teachers and students.

– Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Wider bandwidth for our libraries and schools: Why we need it

Our teachers and our students need access to digital information in order to prepare all students for success. Wider bandwidth will provide students with increased opportunities for digital learning, including virtual classrooms, online instruction and communication, interactive instruction, instructional gaming, blended learning, and on-line assessments, such as the PARCC assessment that Rhode Island will implement statewide in 2014.

Rhode Island is planning a major investment toward improving the infrastructure in our schools so that every classroom in the state has access to wireless technology. Wireless technology will provide teachers with instant access to assessment and demographic data on all of their students and with a vast array of resources on instruction, curriculum, assessments, and professional development. This investment will be for naught, however, unless we can provide the required bandwidth to meet the ever-expanding demand for data and information to our schools.

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Wider bandwidth to our libraries and schools: How we will provide it

Currently, we meet the bandwidth needs of our schools and libraries through the RI Telecommunications Education Access Fund (RITEAF). The revenue for this fund comes from a monthly surcharge of 26 cents on telephone bills.

Unfortunately, revenues for this fund have been declining just as the need for bandwidth support is growing.

Governor Chafee's Fiscal Year 2013 budget calls for a *reduction* in the monthly telephone surcharge, from 26 cents to 15 cents; however, the Governor also proposes extending the surcharge to include wireless devices.

With this revision, the surcharge would produce over \$700,000 in new state revenue to support RITEAF. In addition, the federal government provides a \$1.50 for \$1 match for all state revenues, so Rhode Island's investments will yield a total of \$1.8 million to support expanding the bandwidth for our libraries and schools.

This investment in wider bandwidth will enable libraries to provide Internet access for the economically disadvantaged in their communities, after-school educational activities for children, and tools to help the unemployed in Rhode Island in their search for gainful employment. This investment in wider bandwidth will enable our teachers to advance student learning and will enable our students to prepare for success in the 21st century global economy.

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